

**Rev. Abraham Hernandez**  
**New Haven, CT.**

**Senate Bill 1085 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE LEGALIZATION OF THE RETAIL SALE  
AND POSSESSION OF CANNABIS AND CONCERNING ERASURE OF CRIMINAL  
RECORDS IN THE CASE OF CONVICTIONS BASED ON THE POSSESSION OF A SMALL  
AMOUNT OF CANNABIS.**

March 22, 2019

Greetings Members of the Joint Committee on General Law,

My name is Rev. Abraham Hernandez. I am the executive director of the CT. Chapter of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference which represents over 250 Hispanic Evangelical Churches in CT which is part of 44,118 churches across the country. I would like to testify in opposition to SB1085 due to my concern of how marijuana use and abuse is affecting our society, especially our inner cities and children.

I come before you today to respectfully, yet firmly speak against the retail sale of recreational marijuana. I believe that there are significant concerns with this measure that should set off alarms in the hearts and minds of all our legislators, our governor & our state residents.

There are vast numbers of concerns that race through my mind on a daily basis when I reflect on how legalizing marijuana for recreational purposes will further devastate communities that have been decimated by the repercussions of drugs for decades. Before our legislature travel down the fast track of legalizing marijuana, I'd like to highlight 3 of those concerns. I hope we can keep the following in mind:

1. There are currently 4 million middle school & high school students vaping in the US, thus dangerously experimenting. As stated by the CDC, this has reached "epidemic proportions" and should concern us. This is happening and vaping is already "regulated"...
2. By normalizing marijuana, marijuana products will be available in the market which positions it a minor step away from many of our state's kids who are experimenting with vaping to also experiment and consume it and this should concern us...
3. Recent Data from the state of Colorado reveals that there were 111,000 users in 2014 and a mere three years later 204,000 state residents were consuming marijuana in 2017. The market of consumers in Colorado has expanded drastically and this should concern us...

For the sake of our Black & Brown communities, I would like to set the record straight, because it strikes me to constantly hear the false propaganda that proponents of this legislation have been sharing as if it were Gospel. It tears my heart to hear each and every time that marijuana should be legalized for "reasons of justice" because "our communities of color are being arrested at a much more disproportionate rate in comparison with the Anglo

community". The rhetoric is interesting, because data from the states OPM indicates that it's not so in CT - In 2017 there were a mere 32 people (with no desire to minimize the impact of any arrest) arrested due to marijuana related incidents. However, the following illustrates the post marijuana legalization ramifications in Colorado:

"All painted as a noble cause to seek to reduce incarceration rates among these communities but legalizing marijuana has had the opposite effect.

According to the Colorado Department of Public Safety, arrests in Colorado of black and Latino youth for marijuana possession have increased 58% and 29% respectively after legalization. This means that Black and Latino youth are being arrested more for marijuana possession after it became legal.

This is why I and over 300 Evangelical Clergy in CT vehemently condemn the intentional misstatements of facts & emphatically condemn it as flat out wrong. Our residents are being misled and it's just not right... Our state residents deserve to hear the truth... Let truth & justice reign... I plea with you and all our remaining legislators to do their due diligence and not allow proponents pull the wool over your heads and eyes... Decriminalization in 2011 worked for the residents of CT.

Within all of these dire concerns, there is a beacon of hope and would like to join the chorus of voices of those who propose that our state's General Assembly take measures to seek and expunge records of CT residents who are incarcerated and/or whose records have been tarnished for way too long by marijuana possession. We need to put an end to how past marijuana convictions continue to haunt families and loved ones years and even decades after they paid their debts to society. Criminal justice reform in our state is long overdue and efforts should be undertaken by our legislature, the governor's office and stake holders including the community at large to eradicate the injustices that's adversely impacted our communities of color for generations...

I hope I don't live to see the day that any of CT's school Superintendents repeat what Dr. Barry Bull, the Superintendent of Cherry Creek Schools (one of the largest school districts in Colorado) stated after 2012 when schools were promised funds from marijuana taxes that would benefit the communities, but "So far, the only thing that the legalization of marijuana has brought to our schools has been marijuana."

Let's meditate and not sacrifice the lives of the next generation's well being, quality of life on the altar of political expediency... Let's not rush to make such a critical and complex decision to enact SB1085. It doesn't MAKE SENSE!!!! PLAIN & SIMPLE IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE!!!

**Therefore, I along with more than 300 Senior Evangelical pastors in CT. strongly urge you to VOTE NO on SB1085. We say No to the legalization of recreational marijuana.**

Respectfully,

Rev. Abraham Hernandez  
Executive Director of NHCLC CT